

## II.

### THE FIRST INHABITANTS.

**Native Tribes.**—Who were the first dwellers in the desert—the earliest human beings to inhabit this once lonely and desolate land? A question for the archæologist, rather than for the historian. So far as known, the original occupants of the region now embraced within the State of Utah were roving Indian tribes, the aborigines of America. Opinions are divided as to whether these included the Cliff Dwellers, a strange and interesting people the remains of whose work may be seen in recesses of the rocks in Southern Utah and other parts. Some authorities identify them with the Moquis and Hopis of Arizona, while others give them a much greater antiquity than any existing red race can boast. This much may be said: The Cliff Dwellers were here long before the savage tribes that were found by the Pioneers. Utah was named after one of those tribes.

It has been supposed that that wonderful Indian race, the Aztecs, who founded in Mexico the empire of the Montezumas, on their way thither from Azatlan, an unknown country in the north, halted for a long period upon the shores of the Great Salt Lake. If the supposition be correct, their presence here was prior to 1195 A. D., about which time the Aztecs reached the Valley of Mexico.\*

**Utes and Shoshones.**—Unlike the Aztecs, the Utahs or Utes were a degraded people. They neither built cities nor founded empires, but dwelt in caves and wigwams, and lived mainly by fishing and hunting. Part of their food was wild roots dug from the ground, and nuts and berries picked from bushes growing by the mountain streams. They also ate crickets and grasshoppers (locusts).† The Utes were a warlike race, and often fought fiercely among themselves. Their most hated foes were the Shoshones or Snake Indians, who roamed over a region east and north of the Great Salt Lake, while the Utes inhabited the country south. They ranged over an area extending from California to New Mexico. The Utes were divided into several bands under different chieftains, "united by a common language and affinities." They cherished many traditions pointing to prominent events in the

\*James D. McCabe, "History of the World," p. 1234.

†The crickets were driven by swarms into fires, and thus roasted. The grasshoppers were dried in the sun, and then pounded into meal, from which cakes were made, said to be tasteful and not at all unwholesome, even to white men who were at times feasted upon them, not knowing of what they were composed.

*"Whitney's Popular History of Utah"*  
*by Orson F. Whitney*

world's history, such as the Creation, the Flood, and the Resurrection of Christ."\*

**Spanish Explorers—Coronado—Cardenas.**—The first white men who are known to have entered the Utah region, were a small party of Spaniards, soldiers in the army of Francisco Vazquez de Coronado, the explorer of New Mexico. This was in the year 1540. What is now Utah was then a part of Mexico, and Mexico belonged to Spain. Coronado, having been appointed governor of Nueva Galicia, headed an expedition northward in search of Cibola and the Seven Cities, concerning which a Spanish priest, Marcos de Nizza, had reported to the Mexican authorities. While in New Mexico, Coronado heard of a great river to the northwest, and sent Captain Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, with twelve men, to explore it. By way of the Moquis villages, Cardenas and his comrades came as far as the south bank of the Colorado, but did not cross the river. They soon returned to report to their commander at Cibola (Zuni).



PUEBLO HOMES.

**Escalante and Dominguez.**—In July, 1776, two Spanish friars of the Franciscan order, Father Sylvestre Velez de Escalante and Father Francisco Atanasio de Dominguez, set out with seven men from Santa Fe, in quest of a direct route to

\*See James Linforth's "Liverpool Route," published in 1855; also a pamphlet issued by Dimick B. Huntington, Indian interpreter, in 1872, and reproduced in the "Improvement Era" for October, 1914.

## 10 WHITNEY'S POPULAR HISTORY OF UTAH.

Monterey, on the California sea-coast. Monterey had then been founded about six years, while Santa Fe had entered upon the latter half of its second century. The California town having become a port of entry for goods shipped from Spain and southern Mexico, it was desirable that a road should be opened for the transmission of troops and supplies from that point to the New Mexican capital. Escalante, who had seen missionary service among the Indians, believed that such a road "could be discovered by passing west by north-west through the land of the Yutas." He convinced the Governor of New Mexico that the project was feasible, and he and his brother priest were placed at the head of an expedition having that discovery in view. The route they were looking for was an old Spanish trail leading westward from Taos:

**From Santa Fe to Utah Lake.**—Pursuing a devious north-westerly course, the two Franciscans, with their party, traversed what is now Western Colorado, and crossed White River, flowing west, near the Utah line. After passing Green River, ascending the Uintah, and reaching the Wasatch Mountains, they came upon the headwaters of Provo River, or one of the neighboring streams, and followed it down to Utah Lake.

The Spaniards were kindly received by the native "Yutas" ("Timpanois") living in willow huts in the valley, but could

learn nothing of a route to the sea, nor of white settlers in all the surrounding region. They were told of a valley to the northward, in which was a wonderful lake of salt water, upon whose shores dwelt "a numerous and quiet nation"—the Puaguampe or Sorcerers, speaking the language of, but not otherwise emulating the hostile Comanches, whom the Yutas greatly dreaded. The Puaguampe were also called Snake-eaters, and were probably identical with the Snakes or Shoshones of later times.

Escalante described Utah Valley—north of which he did not go—as level, and, excepting the marshes on the lake shore, arable. The Spaniards



A DANCING UTE.

named the Jordan River Santa Ana. Bear, deer, and buffalo ranged the region freely, and the bounding jack-rabbit was also plentiful. The streams were filled with fish, and the marshes with wild fowl.

**Expedition Abandoned.**—Late in September the exploring party, with two native guides, resumed their journey. Passing down the Sevier River, which they christened Santa Isabel, they skirted the eastern shore of Sevier Lake, and crossing Beaver River and the adjacent mountains, visited the valley now bearing the name of Escalante. There, owing to the exhaustion of their food supplies, and discouraged by their failure to learn anything of an open route to the Pacific, they reluctantly abandoned the expedition. Traveling eastward toward the Colorado, purchasing as they went seeds from the natives with which to make bread, they came to the bank of the great river, and found, after much difficulty, a ford near where Utah and Arizona now divide. Crossing the Grand Canyon, and passing thence by way of the Moquis villages, they reached Zuni, and in due time Santa Fe.\*

**La Hontan.**—The first white man to hear of the Great Salt Lake—if credence may be given to his rather fanciful narrative—was Baron La Hontan, Lord-Lieutenant of the French colony at Placentia, Newfoundland. His story, published in English in 1735, tells how, in 1689, he sailed up "Long River," described as an affluent of the Mississippi, for a period of six weeks, passing through various savage tribes until he came near the nation of the "Gnacsitares." There he met four captive slaves, "Mozeemleks," who gave him an account of the country from which they came. Their villages, they said, stood upon a stream springing out of a ridge of mountains where Long River took its rise. The Mozeemleks were "numerous and powerful." La Hontan was told that, a hundred and fifty leagues from where he stood, their principal river flowed into a salt lake, three hundred leagues in circumference, by thirty in breadth, the mouth of the river being two leagues wide. Along the lower part of the stream were "six noble cities," and more than a hundred towns, great and small, surrounded "that sort of sea." The lake was navigable for boats. The despotic government of the land was "lodged in the hands of one great head," to whom the rest paid "trembling submission."

**Fremont, the Pathfinder.**—Captain John C. Fremont, sur-

---

\*The Journal or Diario of Father Escalante, kept during his journey to and from Utah Lake, is preserved in the National Library of the City of Mexico. H. H. Bancroft draws upon it in part for his History of Utah, and Dean Harris, in his work, presents what is claimed to be the first English translation of the entire document.

## 12 WHITNEY'S POPULAR HISTORY OF UTAH.

named "The Pathfinder," came to the shores of the Great Salt Lake in the autumn of 1843, after crossing the Rocky Moun-



CAPTAIN FREMONT.

tains on his second exploring expedition to the West. The year before he had ventured only as far as South Pass. Accompanied by "Kit" Carson and others, he now entered "The Great Basin," and on the sixth of September, from the crest of an elevated peninsula (Low Mountain), a little north of Weber River, caught his first glimpse of America's "Dead Sea." Launching his rubber boat he explored Fremont Island, named by him Disappointment Island, because he failed to find there the fertile fields and abundant game he had anticipated.\* Fremont seems to have

thought it probable that he was the first white man, if not to see, at least to use a boat upon, this remarkable body of water. The Lake, however, had been discovered and boats launched upon it many years before the Pathfinder appeared upon the scene.

**The Fur Hunters—James Bridger.**—Early in the nineteenth century this region had been overrun by British and American fur hunters, one of whom, James Bridger, commonly known as Colonel Bridger, claimed to have discovered the Lake in 1825.†

Bridger was then trapping on Bear River. In order to

\*Disappointment Island was renamed Fremont Island by Captain Howard Stansbury, U. S. A., in 1849.

†John Jacob Astor, of New York City, was the patriarch of the fur trade in the United States. As told by Washington Irving, in his entertaining volume "Astoria," Astor founded the American Fur Company, in 1808-1809, and later established Astoria, an Indian trading post, at the mouth of the Columbia River. His plan was to have a line of such posts along the Missouri and the Columbia, with Astoria as the emporium or base of supplies. This was the first attempt by an American citizen to break the monopoly of the fur trade inherited by the British from the French at the conquest of Canada. Astor desired New York, instead of London, to be the main market for the lucrative trade in American peltries. He proposed to dispute the supremacy of the British fur companies among the Indian tribes of the Great West, and at the same time form a friendly alliance with the Russian Fur Company, which supplied St. Petersburg and the Chinese Empire with the prod-

decide a wager among his men, as to the probable course of that stream, he followed it through the mountains to the lake shore. In 1827 four men explored the Lake with skin boats, and reported it to be without outlet. Many supposed it to be an arm of then to the Ocean.

Colonel Bridger established, on the Black's Fork of Green River, a trading post known as Fort Bridger, the site of which is now in southwestern Wyoming. They recorded their impressions in a series of articles published in the *Utah region*. They were wonder-struck by the objects in the vicinity of the Salt Lake. Stansbury afterwards said that frequently occurs, is greater here than elsewhere, distorting objects in the vicinity, giving rise to optical illusions.

**International Dispute.**—Ogden, both prominent in Utah and Nevada, was a pro-Emancipator of Washington, Idaho, by Great Britain and the United States. The northwest boundary between the two nations.

**Overland Route.**—The name from Christopher ("Kit") Carson.

**Trappers and Traders.**—Other names borne by various objects in this region were those of scouts, trappers and traders in early times. Among them may be mentioned Peter Skene Ogden, of the Hudson Bay Company, and Etienne Provot, for whom Provo River was named. Weber River was christened for a trapper on that stream. General Ashley's name still clings to Ashley's Fork, and Major Henry's, to the Henry Mountains. Carson River, now in Nevada, took its

name from Christopher ("Kit") Carson. The effects of this industry on American shores. Astoria, captured by the British during the war of 1812, became a trading post of the Northwest Fur Company, which retained possession of it after the war. The Northwest Company, after a ruinous competition with the Hudson Bay Company, another British concern, was merged into the latter organization, which thenceforth controlled most of the fur trade from Alaska to California, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. They removed their emporium from Astoria (Fort George) to Fort Vancouver, sixty miles up the Columbia River, and from that point continued to furnish their interior posts and send forth their brigades of trappers.

The American fur traders were at first content to follow up the head branches of the Missouri, the Yellowstone, and other rivers and streams on the Atlantic side of the Rocky Mountains. In 1822 General William N. Ashley, of St. Louis, with Major Andrew Henry, the first American to trap on the headwaters of the Columbia, founded a trading post on the Yellowstone, and during the following year pushed a resolute band of trappers into the Green River country. This attempt was succeeded by others, until in 1825 a footing was secured and a complete system of trapping organized west of the Rockies. In 1830 Ashley, with William Sublette, Robert Campbell, James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah S. Smith and others, formed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which had at one time a fort on Utah Lake, then Lake Ashley. Ashley named Green River after one of his companions, and is said to have embarked upon that stream with a fleet of rafts loaded with peltries, thinking he could drift down to St. Louis.

**Captain Bonneville.**—In November, 1833, came Captain Benjamin Bonneville, U. S. A., whose adventures in the West were immortalized by Washington Irving. Of French parentage, but of American rearing, Bonneville was a graduate of West Point, and had been stationed at various military posts on the frontier, prior to undertaking as far famed expedition. Having obtained leave of absence, accompanied by over one hundred men, most of whom Irson and others, he now Indian country, and in May, 1832 entered "The Great Basin," on the Missouri River. Crossing on the sixth of September made a tour through the North, from the crest of an elevated peninsula (Low Mountain), a little north of Weber River, caught his first glimpse of America's "Dead Sea." Launching his rubber boat he explored Fremont Island, named by him Disappointment Island, because he failed to find there the fertile fields and abundant game he had anticipated.\*



CAPTAIN BONNEVILLE.

He brought twenty wagons, loaded with Indian goods, provisions, and ammunition, and is believed to have been the first to use ox teams upon this line of travel.

Bonneville's hope was to revive the American fur trade on the Columbia River, but he was hampered by the powerful influence of the Hudson Bay Company, which held almost absolute sway over the Indian tribes; a condition deemed perilous to the United States. The Company's representatives refused to sell supplies to Bonneville so long as he was conducting a rival enterprise, and it was this circumstance that compelled him to move southward.\*

Bonneville's hope was to revive the American fur trade on the Columbia River, but he was hampered by the powerful influence of the Hudson Bay Company, which held almost absolute sway over the Indian tribes; a condition deemed perilous to the United States. The Company's representatives refused to sell supplies to Bonneville so long as he was conducting a rival enterprise, and it was this circumstance that compelled him to move southward.\*

\*Back from his expedition in 1835, the explorer, while at the country home of John Jacob Astor, met Washington Irving, and placed at the disposal of the great narrator his journals descriptive of his interesting experiences. The result was the publication, in 1837, of "The Adventures of Captain Bonneville." In honor of the captain, Irving named the Great Salt Lake, "Lake Bonneville," but history would not have it so, preferring that the ancient fossil sea should bear that name.

**Missionaries and Emigrants—The Mirage.**—In 1832 parties of missionaries, men and women, crossed the country to the Pacific Coast, and about that time a few American emigrants settled in Oregon. Not until 1841, however, did regular emigration to California begin.

Among the earliest to reach the future land of gold by way of the Utah region, were James Bidwell and Josiah Belden, both prominent in Western history of a later period. They recorded their impressions of the overland journey in a series of articles published in leading American magazines. They were wonder-struck by the phenomenon of the mirage, in the vicinity of the Salt Lake Desert, regarding which Captain Stansbury afterwards said: "The mirage, which frequently occurs, is greater here than I ever witnessed elsewhere, distorting objects in the most grotesque manner, defying all calculation as to their size, shape, or distance, and giving rise to optical illusions almost beyond belief."

**International Dispute Over Oregon.**—When the first Americans settled on the Pacific Coast, California, including Utah and Nevada, was a province of Mexico; while Oregon, embracing Washington, Idaho and other parts, was claimed by Great Britain and the United States. The dispute over the northwest boundary came very near bringing on a war between the two nations.\*

**The Overland Route.**—Westward travel over the plains

---

\*The United States laid claim to the country west of the Rocky Mountains from the northern line of California to the southern boundary of Alaska, or the parallel of 54° 40'. Hence the phrase, "Fifty-four Forty or Fight," a Democratic political slogan of that period. The British claim extended as far south as the Columbia River.

Says Dr. Wilbur F. Gordy, an American historian: "We had several reasons for claiming Oregon. In 1792 Captain Gray, of Boston, discovered the Columbia River, which he named in honor of his ship; in 1805 Lewis and Clark explored this river, and in 1811 an American company established at its mouth the trading post Astoria. But we made a yet stronger claim by reason of the actual settlements which Americans planted there before 1845. These settlements began in a small way as early as 1832. \* \* \* In this matter of planting settlements we had the advantage of England, because we were nearer the disputed territory. For a long time, to be sure, the English Hudson Bay Company had been out there making money in fur trading, but this company had planted no settlement. \* \* \* The English Hudson Bay Company held only a small number of military posts and trading stations. The United States could therefore claim the country by right of actual possession."—"History of the United States," pp. 269, 270.

The controversy became serious, but a clash of arms was happily averted. In 1846, after a joint occupancy, each country, by treaty, gave up a part of its claim, and the boundary line was then fixed at 49°, where it still remains.



## 16 WHITNEY'S POPULAR HISTORY OF UTAH.

usually started from Independence, Missouri, which was then on the frontier of the United States. Most of the emigrants traveled in companies, for society, aid and protection. Those not already provided with outfits procured them on the frontier, each family requiring one or more covered wagons ("prairie schooners") loaded with provisions and supplies. As a rule the wagons were drawn by oxen, and four or five months were consumed in journeying over plains and mountains to the sea. The usual route of travel was up the Platte River, past Forts Kearney and Laramie, and thence along the Sweetwater and through South Pass. West of the Pass—now in Wyoming—those going to Oregon turned northward to Fort Hall; while those bound for California followed Bear River to within a few miles of the Great Salt Lake, and then, turning westward to Humboldt River, crossed the country to the Sierra Nevada.\*

**The Donner Party.**—One of those early emigrant companies was extremely unfortunate. The Donner Party, as it was called, comprised eighty-seven men, women and children, led by George Donner and James F. Reed. They left Independence late in April or early in May, 1846, and in July reached Fort Bridger. There they tarried several days before setting out for California. The usual route from Fort Bridger was by way of Bear River, Fort Hall, and the northern shore of the Great Salt Lake; but another route, just beginning to be traveled, passed through Echo and Weber Canyons and around the south side of the Lake. This was called "The Hastings Cut-off," its projector being Lansford W. Hastings, a mountaineer and guide. Friends of Mr. Reed, who had preceded him to California, had written, warning him not to take the cut-off, but to travel by way of Fort Hall. That letter he never received. At Fort Bridger he and his companions were persuaded to follow the new trail as far as the foot of Echo Canyon, and there take another cut-off, up East Canyon, over the Wasatch Mountains, and down the gorge now known as Emigration Canyon.

The journey was exceedingly difficult. They were sixteen days in cutting a road through the mountains. Then came the crossing of the desert, where many of their cattle died for want of grass and water, while others wandered away or were stolen by Indians. Some of the wagons had to be left

---

\*Fort Kearney (Nebraska) was a Government post, and Fort Laramie (Wyoming) also became one, though formerly a station of the American Fur Company. Fort Hall (Idaho), an establishment of the Hudson Bay Company, though it was in the same region, is not to be confounded with the post now bearing that name.

behind. Delayed by these and other misfortunes, the ill-fated emigrants did not strike the main trail on the Humboldt until late in September, after the last companies of the season had gone by. Another month brought them to Truckee Pass, where early snows blocked the way. Some killed their cattle and went into winter quarters, while others delayed building cabins until heavier snows fell.

**A Tragic Fate.**—It was now December; their provisions were almost gone, and starvation stared the unfortunate travelers in the face. A number of them, putting on snow shoes, crossed the stormy mountains to New Helvetia (Sacramento); but before reaching there several died from cold, hunger, and exhaustion, and the others, in order to save themselves, ate the flesh of the dead. Relief parties were sent back to the main company, and most of them were saved; but thirty-nine of the original eighty-seven perished. The survivors, when found, had been living for weeks like cannibals. The last one was picked up in April, 1847, the same month that the Pioneers of Utah set out for the West.